

WIPP Quick Facts (As of 9-1-10)

8,884

Shipments received since opening
(8,481 CH and 403 RH)

69,993

Cubic meters of waste disposed
(69,788 CH and 205 RH)

136,468

Containers disposed in the
underground
(136,068 CH and 400 RH)

Public weighs in on WIPP permit



Members of the public spoke at the WIPP permit hearings in Santa Fe and Carlsbad last month.

WIPP stakeholders recently had a chance to weigh in on a draft WIPP Hazardous Waste Facility Permit issued by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) in April 2010. Opportunities for the public to comment on the draft permit took place in Santa Fe and Carlsbad, N.M., during formal public hearings.

Two days of technical testimony were heard in Santa Fe, followed by non-technical testimony from 37 interested stakeholders in both Santa Fe and Carlsbad.

WIPP's initial permit was issued by NMED in 1999 and requires renewal every 10 years. The application for permit renewal was submitted in 2009. Following recommendations by the public hearing officer, a decision by NMED is anticipated by the end of the 2010.

Bingaman, Teague visit WIPP



CBFO Manager Dave Moody briefed U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman and Congressman Harry Teague on CBFO, contractor and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act activities at WIPP.

Pictured above (l to r): Moody, Teague and Bingaman addressed WIPP employees gathered in the Skeen-Whitlock Building lobby.

WIPP receives 400th RH shipment



File Photo

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant continues to achieve shipping milestones. Last month, WIPP received the 400th shipment of remote-handled transuranic (RH-TRU) waste. The shipment originated from Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL).

WIPP salt removal begins



Magnum Blue Ribbon Feeds began removing salt from the WIPP site last month. Magnum agreed to remove approximately 300,000 tons of run-of-mine salt mined from the WIPP underground to use in a cattle feed supplement. In a unique agreement between DOE and Magnum Minerals LLC, the Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District will administer a contract that allows proceeds from the sale of salt to remain in southeast New Mexico for use in public works projects.

Magnum will take approximately five years to remove all 300,000 tons from WIPP.

RH-TRU waste was first shipped to WIPP in 2007. To date, WIPP has received RH-TRU waste from six generator sites, including more than 50 shipments from ORNL.

The RH-TRU waste disposal container is shipped in a lead-lined transportation container called the RH-72B. In the underground, the RH waste is disposed in pre-drilled boreholes in the walls of each room inside the disposal panels.

Mine Rescue Team competes in nationals



WIPP Blue Team

The 19th annual National Metal/Non-Metal Mine Rescue Competition took place in Reno, Nevada last month, and once again, WIPP was well represented in the competition, sending both the WIPP Blue and Red teams to the finals.

In the "Field Competition," the WIPP Blue team finished in second place, narrowly missing out on first place. Joe Baca received a score of 100 percent on the written exam and the team received no discounts in the field. In the "First Aid Contest," the Blue and Red teams finished in fifth and sixth place, respectively. A total of 38 teams from around the nation competed in the event.



WIPP Red Team

The most impressive award for WIPP was received by Baca. He was inducted into the Metal/Non-Metal Mine Rescue Hall of Fame, making him the second WIPP employee to receive this honor. Buddy Webb, trainer for WIPP's mine rescue teams, was the first. Baca's mine rescue career began when he came to WIPP in 1991, where he served as a benchman and a fresh air base attendant. Since then, he has competed in 65 benchman competitions, finishing in either first or second place in 46 different events.



Buddy Webb, left, Joe Baca, center and WTS President and General Manager Farok Sharif

Portage assumes CTAC contract

Portage, Inc. has officially assumed its new role as the Carlsbad Field Office Technical Assistance Contractor (CTAC). The contract came into effect on August 11.

"Portage is pleased to return to Carlsbad and WIPP, having held the CTAC contract from 2000-2005," CTAC Acting Manager Dick Toft said. "The team is assembled and successfully transitioned and we are focused on providing outstanding support to the CBFO in carrying out its important mission."

Portage will provide technical assistance to CBFO and WIPP over the length of the three-year contract, which includes support for quality assurance, safety oversight support, environmental and

regulatory services support, National Transuranic (TRU) Program technical support, performance demonstration program management, science and international program support, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act support and operations oversight support. The contract has two one-year options available as well.

Emergency Response Team participates in regional evaluation

The Mine Rescue Team isn't the only one making headlines for WIPP. Recently, WIPP's Emergency Response Team made a trip to Midway, Utah, in which they received excellent scores in the regional rescue team evaluation. The evaluation was administered by the Rocky Mountain Coal Mining Institute.



In the individual competition, each of the WIPP team members performed well to the given rescue scenarios. Members were graded on safety and treatment of patients within each scenario. In the team competition, each team was graded on how well they worked within the unified command systems involving different teams on various scenarios. The WIPP team received an overall cumulative score of 95% for the individual and team evaluation.

"The final score for all events shows the dedication of all team members and demonstrates that we are prepared for any and all emergencies," team co-captain Craig Heine said.

Safety fair centers on mission excellence



This year's WIPP safety fair brought employees together for food, fun and a strong safety message. Based on a "Getting to Mission Excellence" theme, department-sponsored booths displayed topics such as focus, accountability and disciplined conduct of operations.

Above: CBFO Manager Dave Moody in the dunking booth as part of the Security Walls safety fair booth. Security Walls is the security contractor for WIPP.

EXO Update: Data collection will soon be underway

Scientists involved with the Enriched Xenon Observatory (EXO) project at WIPP will soon begin collecting experimental data to learn more about a subatomic particle called a neutrino.

Project lead Michelle Dolinski, of Stanford University, said researchers should begin collecting what's called commissioning data this month.

"It's progress. Really, we'll all be happy when we start taking real physics data. We're hoping to have that happen by the end of this year," Dolinski said.

Stanford University leads a host of institutions in collaborating on the project, which aims to look for a previously-unobserved particle physics phenomenon called neutrinoless double beta decay. Such an observation would prove that the subatomic neutrino is its own antiparticle and take scientists a step closer to understanding the mass of a neutrino.

Scientists involved with the EXO project spent six years designing and assembling a tank that will soon hold 200 kilograms of liquid xenon. The process was complicated by an extensive effort toward eliminating as many sources of background radiation as possible, which would interfere with the experiment. The project is located at WIPP due to the low levels of background radiation in WIPP's underground repository.

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"The detector will tell us the position of an interaction of radiation with xenon, and the energy," Dolinski said.

"What we're looking for are events where the xenon itself decays and emits radiation." If neutrinoless double beta decay occurs in the EXO tank, it will display a brief flash of energy and leave behind an atom of barium.

The detector for the project, called the Time Projection Chamber, was installed in January. Researchers then worked at getting the project's gas circulation system up and running.



The Enriched Xenon Observatory's cryostat (above) had its key components installed earlier in the year. Now, scientists are in what's called a commissioning and purification mode.

"As of May, our experiment was full of xenon gas," Dolinski said. "We then went into commissioning and purification mode."

Dolinski said scientists have to make sure that everything is stable before they allow the xenon to cool down and liquefy.

Once the xenon is liquefied, experimenters will spend some time getting the electronics working at that setting, Dolinski said. Researchers will then be able to start taking commissioning data, another way of making sure everything is running exactly as planned. Scientists will replace the liquefied xenon with liquefied enriched xenon after collecting enough data.

"Once it seems like everything is stable, we'll basically sit and wait. We'll do maintenance and take data," Dolinski said.

The U.S. Department of Energy
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

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